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ABSTRACT

Analysis of the speech of the people of Santa Maria Lachixio, a Zapotec town in Mexico shows they use a high voice to show respect toward others, and that variability in the height of pitch is unimportant. No other voice quality changes occur, such as laryngealization or breathiness. Kinship, age, and authority are important determiners of high pitch. The greatest effort toward teaching children this sign of respect occurs between the ages of 6 and 12 years. By 12, children are expected to know how to speak and behave respectfully. Slight differences occur in patterns of men and women, based on interlocutor age and authority differences. Both speak in high pitch to their children's godparents, employers, and town authorities. Men speak in high voice to men and women the approximate age of 60 sixty, and to certain outsiders (doctors or teachers). Women are more likely to use high voice with men and women only slightly older than they, and with parents-in-law. Most conversations are begun and ended in high voice, with dialogue in between spoken in a normal voice, although some are conducted entirely in high voice. Some speakers transfer high voice use to Spanish. (MSE)

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Demonstrating respect to the addressee is accomplished by speaking in a high-pitched voice among the Zapotec speakers of Santa María Lachixío. Various factors determine the use of this feature.

In July 1974 my family and I went to the village of Santa María Lachixío to ask the town authorities for permission to live in their village, for the purpose of learning their language. The men left us alone while they went to discuss our request. After they had been gone for quite some time, we heard what we thought were little girls playing dolls outside. On closer inspection we saw, through the window, the town authorities standing in a circle, heads to the middle, hats behind them in their right hands. It was they who had been speaking! This was our introduction to the use of high-pitched voice (high voice).

The people of Santa María Lachixío, a Zapotec town in the district of Sola de Vega, Oaxaca, Mexico, use high voice to show respect toward others. Actual speaking in high voice varies from individual to individual. While some speakers raise their pitch an octave, others seem to raise it as high as their larynxes will allow. Speaking in a higher pitch is the important thing; how much so is immaterial. When speaking in high voice, no voice quality changes occur, such as laryngealization or breathiness.

The custom of using high voice is also practiced in the neighboring town of San Vicente Lachixío, and in a town over the mountain called San Miguel Mixtepec. Both San Vicente Lachixío and San Miguel Mixtepec are closely related linguistically to Santa María Lachixío, and intelligibility among the three villages runs as high as 85%.

Speaking in high voice is obligatory for children when they are addressing their godparents (and the godparents' children above the age of fifteen years), their grandparents, the town authorities, and adult relatives. Children refer to adults who are not close relatives, such as store owners, family friends, etc., as 'aunt' and 'uncle'. Towards them the obligation for high voice decreases. If children make a mistake with them, the offense is not so grave. As they are sent out on errands, children are reminded to "be sure to speak respectfully."

Parents begin seriously teaching children the importance of showing respect when they are about four years of age. It is easier to teach girls than boys, they say. This is because the girls are around the house with the mother, observing what the mother says and does when visitors come. Boys, on the other hand, are out in the fields working and tending to animals. Consequently they pay less attention to such matters. Much of the teaching and reinforcing is done by the grandparents.

In Santa María Lachixío, the greatest effort at teaching children *how* to show respect is made between the ages of six and twelve. During that period of time people will chuckle when children make mistakes, but from age twelve and up they are expected to know how to speak and behave respectfully. If a child does not, the parents draw it to the child's attention telling him, "If you don't speak respectfully, people will think ill of *us*, not you."

There are a few differences between men and women and their use of high voice. Both speak in high voice to their children's godparents (the parents' *compadres* or 'co-parents'), employers, and town authorities. Men also speak in high voice to men and women over the age of approximately sixty, and to certain outsiders, such as doctors or teachers. Women, on the other hand, are more

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likely to use high voice with men and women who are only *slightly* older than they, and with their parents-in-law.

Most conversations are begun and ended in high voice with dialogue in between spoken in a normal voice. People say this is because it is very uncomfortable to carry on an entire conversation in a high squeaky voice. However, in my close association with two families in Santa María Lachixío for more than twenty years, my experience with the wives in these families has been that they always speak to me in high voice for practically the entire conversation. When I questioned one as to whether she couldn't speak to me normally, she said she could never do that because I am older than she, I have had much more education and, therefore, I merit respect. All this makes it impossible for her to address me in a familiar form. The husbands of these two families do *not* address me in high voice, however.

Many Zapotec languages, including Lachixío Zapotec, have ways of showing politeness in their pronoun systems by the choice of the third person pronoun (Marlett 1993). Some also have a morpheme which precedes a second person pronoun to indicate respect for the addressee (Steve Marlett, p.c.). To my knowledge, however, Lachixío Zapotec is the only Zapotec language that has this device of high pitch for showing respect to the addressee.

Some speakers transfer the practice of high voice to Spanish. One of the women mentioned above uses high voice when speaking Spanish to a particular North American woman of sixty-five years of age. She can't bring herself to speak in a normal voice to someone she respects, regardless of language.

While a lot of sociolinguistic work has focused on politeness, a check of two sociolinguistic textbooks (Fasold 1990 and Wardhaugh 1993) revealed a variety of devices used to indicate such, pronouns and syntax being the principal means. Neither textbook mentioned the use of pitch, however.

This practice in Santa María Lachixío (and environs) appears to be a case of where the only marker of politeness is high voice. Informal research has indicated that this feature was noted among other language groups in Mexico in the past, e.g., Otomí and Tzotzil. In Santa María Lachixío, however, town officials no longer use it among themselves. Nevertheless, this feature is still practiced throughout the village where respect is required. Such demonstration of politeness and showing of respect appears to be an uncommon and, sadly, fast-disappearing phenomenon.

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